

Oral History - Theresa Wetch and her granddaughter, Terri Ann
March 12, 1996
Interviewed by Evelyn McClure

EM: Theresa, do you want to tell me something about your family history?
Where were you born and raised?

TW: I grew up in Washington State. 50 miles north of Seattle.

EM: What year were you born?

TW: 1910

EM: Can you tell me something about your family?

TW: My father was a homesteader. My mother came from Germany and my father came from Switzerland. My father, I don't know how he landed in San Francisco and for \$1 he bought the homestead rights for 160 acres in Washington. He travelled up there on foot and staked out the property and it's still in the family. It's in the fifth generation now.

EM: what is your family name?

TW: Scher. I don't know how we got the C in there. There is a Scher in Alexander Valley. Which is a cousin of mine.

EM: So how did you get to Sebastopol.?

TW: My husband and three of his friends, they had a brainstorm when they were young men, they were going to go Canada. I guess they were going to go up there to see how much beer they could drink.

EM: Was this during Prohibition era?

TW: Yeah. They stopped on the homestead on the way up. I had a sister that had been down here before. In fact my grandparents are buried at Windsor. My grandfather came from Switzerland with his entire family, except one child. One child was too young to travel. So they came without that one child. That one child remained in Switzerland and never came to this country.

EM: But your grandfather settled in the Windsor area?

TW: Yes, my grandfather in fact, they started the Windsor winery.

EM: So your family was here except for your father who'd gone to Washington to homestead.

TW: Yes my father had two sisters who stayed down here.

EM: So your husband came through, stopped, saw your family and that's how you met? What was your husband's first name?

TW: George. There's always been a George Wetch. There's a George Wetch now.

EM: When were you married.? How long a courtship did you have?

TW: I knew my husband over a year. The chemistry just clicked when he came to the ranch. Finally after a year's time, we wrote letters and he and I came to California. I visited an aunt. And that was it.

EM: You got married in what year? Was that about the time you settled here in Sebastopol?

TW: Well we lived on Bodega Ave. So how long was that?

Terri: 1930 something

TW: I thought it was 1931.

EM: Were you married down here or up in Washington?

TW: No, I went to Washington to marry.

EM: So then you settled in Sebastopol. What did your husband do?

TW: Wetch Bros. a plumbing business.

EM: I should ask you something about your family. You had children?

TW: I had three children. Terri is my oldest granddaughter. She's a Gala Day baby. Get my Gala Day bracelet with all those hearts on it. (charm bracelet)

EM: When did you start working for the Chamber of Commerce? Before your children were born or after they were grown?

TW: No, I think Terri Ann's mother was 10 years old when I went to work for the Chamber of Commerce. Do you have any history on Sebastopol? Dr. Sweetnam was the mayor. He was the mayor then. They lived across the street in the second house. (Theresa lives on the southwest corner of High and Willow St.s)

EM: So that was in the 40s something. (Historic note: Dr. Sweetnam was mayor of Sebastopol from 1931 to 1946.)

TW: And her mother lived in this house here. Mrs. Finnell. They were old timers here. Dr. Sweetnam never had any children. I remember one time we used to visit there on Mondays when Mrs. Sweetnam had the housekeeper come and

do all her housework. She had to stay home on Mondays and see it was done right. Mrs. Finnell was very fond of my youngest.

(pause / change of subject and looking at pictures)

EM: In 1915. The apple show. It would be the grounds here.

TW: That service station wasn't there.

EM: Do you remember it and can you tell me something about what was there? During the apple show.

TW: It was really spectacular. The displays they made in those days were really something. And I should have... I threw my chamber of commerce stuff away. I had pictures of floats. Of things there you would be interested in. Of course those pictures weren't the only pictures. You could still get it. Then after, then there wasn't any thing for a long time because there was the war. L.R. Hart and George Keefe decided. was the one that wanted to reinvest the apple, they were going to have this apple tour to bring people to town.

EM: You were working for the chamber at that time weren't you? And he(George Keefe) got the chamber to sponsor the tour?

TW: Yes, they put those signs out on the road. There was a little bit of friction there between where they would go west of town. On the Gold Ridge there were some of the best views from Gold Ridge but that was kind of out of the way of what some of these wanted the tour to go. But anyway.

EM: But did they go the nice view route or did they change it.?

TW: Well, the signs went by the board. They were eliminated because there wasn't the money. No one was interested enough to bring the money out.

EM: How about the apple industry and the growers, were they members of the chamber? You would think they would support it?

TW: Apparently I wasn't too nosy. I wasn't interested in their differences. There was friction there between the growers at that time. There was quite a little bit of friction between L.R. Hart and he had . . . wasn't a packing house. on Petaluma Ave. down there back of where the auto industry was.

EM: Was he a fruit broker?

TW: No he was interested in the fresh fruit. There was all that friction as to who got the first fruit/shipment to the market. They were fighting back and forth. I didn't pay too much attention to it. There was a terrific joke something happened. At the time I was so busy taking care of my little end of it that I didn't realize what happened. Butler was on Main Street and he was in insurance. Frances Wetch might be able to fill in something about Butler. Butler and Hart

were at loggers' end about something. Butler came through my office going down to Hart's office and I didn't tell him something. He said if I'd told him he wouldn't be out on a limb there somehow. Something would have been different. He said "why didn't you tell me, Theresa" Course I was new on the job, see and I was only there to answer the telephone. I wasn't supposed to get involved (with their policy) I had family to buck. There were Wetch Bros. in business. So I had family there. And being such a strong Catholic family, the Wetches. I had no business going out working. Even when my oldest daughter was ten years old. My mother-in-law tried to tell me that I should stay home and have another baby.

EM: That was the attitude toward women and working in that era.

TW: Really, but I always have to remember to say that my mother would never have told me to stay home and have babies. And my mother was raised a Catholic. My mother came from a Catholic background.

EM: Did she work outside the home?

TW: On the homestead. My mother could do anything. She was little, petite. That's a very poor drawing. I enjoy that picture. I took her to the Sonoma County Fair. There was a guy, my mother couldn't walk good anymore. Her hips gave out. There was a guy on the walkway and he was doing pictures. I don't know whether my mother sat down there or whether I thought I'd have her picture taken. It was a big thrill to her anyway. It turned out the guy came from Germany. He knew all about where my mother came from. So they had something. I went on to see the fair and she sat there.

EM: How many members did the chamber have when you were working there? How many businesses belong?

TW: Well you see it didn't take much to belong to the chamber of commerce then. Everybody belonged to the chamber of commerce. What was it that my friend showed me. Flora Simpson. she said something about every fool...belonged to the chamber or they were a fool if they didn't belong or something. You see the Ajalon, is it still in existence.? (it is) We started the Ajalon Letter Shop. Lorita Pinney(?) and Flora Simpson started it. They went from a little bit of printing into being a business.

EM: Were there many women run businesses in the 40s in Sebastopol.?

TW: No I don't think so. Do you know Anna W...? She's a woman you should visit for some history. She was the one that kind of started the letter shop. She had the letter shop from Lorita Pinney (?) She lives west of town. Her husband had an orchard out there. I believe he was in the pesticide business or spray business. He had / sold stuff. But she has a sharp memory of what went on.

Terry: My mother said you should know that she and her sisters were the first princesses of Gala Days. My mother's name was Rita Marie, she's the oldest

and Nadine Anna and Frieda Louise Wetch. They were the lifeguards at Ives Pool.

TW: I had a picture of the girls in that hole before they poured the cement.

EM: Let's talk about Gala Days. How did that begin? Do you remember the background how it started?

TW: That bracelet has some dates.

EM: Terri Ann said you sent to a chamber of commerce meeting and came back with the idea of Gala Days? to promote the area? This picture of kids in bathing suits.

Terri Ann: It looks like a parade.

EM: You'd have to print it (we were looking at a negative) and see what the lettering on the flag says.

TW: Oh that's the first Gala Day parade. See that's Bingo the dog. That was Dr. Sweetnam's dog, Bingo, the first Bingo. Something happened to Bingo.

EM: Was this down Main Street?

TW: Yes. Terri: See the railroad tracks.

TW: It was so hot, they couldn't wear shoes, I didn't think shoes were appropriate, they were in their bathing suits. It was hard for them to walk there.

EM: So you organized the parade? Was this from one school? Who was in the parade?

TW: Let's see how did that go... It just kind of evolved out of thin air...I wonder if it had something .. an invisible seed that was planted. School's let out for children for religious classes. that didn't go on very long. We were Catholic and of course that put the Wetch Bros. who had a voice on Main Street, because of a priest taking the children down to a class. Whether that was an instigator of children marching down the street you can never be sure where the seed came from.

Terri: Mom said you took a seminar in San Francisco and came back with an idea from that.

TW: No. That was something else entirely. I was a first president of the Sonoma County Tuberculosis Assoc. which got a foothold here.

EM: You mean TB?

TW: Not the disease, the Association. I remember somebody came and wanted me to be president. I'd never been president, in fact, I'd never belonged to anything let alone. Boy was I embarrassed one time they had a meeting and wanted to honor the past president, whoever was master of ceremonies that night kind of left me out of the picture. I got on the tail end of the table and was forgotten about. I remember I was a little bit hurt. They were honoring all these past presidents and they left me out.

TW: We had the first ambulance service while I was in the Chamber. Organized the ambulance.

EM: Who operated it? Was it volunteer? How would they receive calls (for help?)

TW: All volunteer. They called the Chamber of Commerce. I was on call 24 hrs a day. And Joe Johnson, I don't think he's living anymore. He was a good samaritan in Sebastopol. If it hadn't been for him the ambulance would have never succeeded. And it got to the place where Palm Drive Hospital saw it was bringing them business. Somehow politics worked in there and they got in there and that left the Chamber out. There was this opposition to the Chamber in the community from something way back in the apple ... there were two apple groups. They quarrelled with each other and one belonged to the chamber and was chamber of commerce minded and the other wasn't. Alfred Hallberg was an awful nice fellow and Louise Hallberg I think was his daughter.

EM: Hallberg's were members or not of the chamber?

TW: Alfred was. he was a supporter of the chamber. But I don't think Louise fit in there very well. I don't think she would give you a warm feeling about how she felt about her father and the chamber of commerce. But Alfred he was like that with me. He was a nice guy. You might say he saw the writing on the wall. Harold Pellini, is he still around? Sometimes I missed out I would be with my daughter in San Mateo. I wouldn't be in town.

EM: Can you tell me some other significant activities in the community of the chamber of commerce? Did they have a lot of social events in the 40s. What was the chamber organized to do? What was their purpose. How were they to help businesses?

TW: Hedgepeth (?) There were two. Hedgepeth moved that tree in the fairgrounds, what do they call that, the midway? Hedgepeth moved a redwood tree in the gangway. They had wine tasting. The wine industry took over. Then I guess that was the end of it. I don't know what the fair is like its been a few years since I've been. I went to a flower show last year, I remember.

EM: When did you leave the chamber, Did you retire?

TW: That's a cute story, I didn't know how I was going to get out of the chamber of commerce. Somebody got the big idea they were going to have a big

celebration because Theresa was through with the chamber of commerce. They were going to have a celebration honoring me and Maury? Hart. You couldn't help but like Maury. He was a little man, bald-headed. But you waited for that man to say something. In a crowd of fellows to be around. Because the way he said things, the way he used the English language was something ... I've never heard anybody that could talk like he could.

EM: What did he do in town?

TW: He was with Hart in that apple plant back there. That finally gave up. I often said to Maury what are you doing hiding behind those apple boxes. Because he could have done anything with his gift of gab.

EM: What happened when you were going to leave the chamber?

TW: I didn't want that (big celebration) So I just kind of up and left.

EM: How many years had you worked at the chamber?

TW: 23 years. Terri: Mom says 28. Wasn't that the year my parents went to Thailand and I was in grade school. I was born in 1957 was it 1967..?

EM: Can you think of anything else you want to tell us about your day's at the chamber. Were you there a full day or did you work part time.

TW: I didn't work a full day. My youngest, Louise she was out of school early, she came down there. All my girls they don't complain, but they talk about their days at the chamber of commerce trained them for what they went on to do in their lifetime. Because they answered the phone there when I'd go to the bank or uptown for business. And they were liked. Everybody admired those girls.

Terri: Grandmother made all their clothes, coats and hats. Swimming suits. One time one of the girls jumped in the pool and the suit fell off because it was too big.

TW: No I knitted a suit. And when they got wet they just sagged.

EM: That was quite an effort to keep three girls in clothing sewing everything.

Terri: They weren't that far apart in ages.

TW: My girls say they were the best dressed. Other girls came to school in the fall with something new and they were the only girls that had new things during the year because.....I never felt we were overdressed.

EM: Can you identify the lady in this picture holding the sign?

(looking at pictures) veteran's bldg. being built.

TW: I had a campfire group, bluebirds. They came to the chamber of commerce and met after school. We outgrew that. (tape not transcribed here, contains personal info) . . . There were some men who had a hold of the reins that individually asked me if I wanted my job back. Because I could have it, they would see that I would have it if I wanted it back. And all I could do was shrug my shoulders and say if they don't want me I don't want them. That was the end of that. I was out. See what happened. . . a Wetch, got on the board of directors, and when he got on the board, I thought oh well that will take care of everything, I'll sit back now and do my job. We issued fire permits and dog licenses and all kinds of things came into the chamber to do.

EM: It almost operated like city hall?

TW: Yes, but it didn't work that way, (referring to her situation) that nephew of mine he thought that that was a man's job and they out to get rid of me in spite of the fact that I was his aunt and part of the family. He had no...

EM: Was he the person that made it uncomfortable for you to be there?

TW: Yes, he didn't realize I was glad to get out. I didn't need that job. I had a little business of my own going with the sewing that I was doing for people. Then we were, I still belonged to the Republican Women and I we were told we were all supposed to do something to make some money for the Republican group. I told them any sewing they brought me I'd still do and they could have the money for it, but apparently it hasn't developed into anything. Nobody's brought me anything. Have they? . . . I never seem to be able to say no.

(conversation diverts to talk of sewing)

The end